

To be a friend of Israel demands no less than supporting her through these very difficult days, as well as the better ones we all know await her, and await her people in the future. And despite decades of terror in the holy cradle of faith, we must hope, as did a fifteen year-old girl hiding in Amsterdam writing in her diary less than a month before she was taken to Auschwitz, "I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more."

You know Ladies and Gentlemen, through God's grace, the friendship of the United States and Israel will endure to see the dreams of that little girl fill the whole world with light and truth forever.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 1715, TO
ENHANCE VA'S AUTHORITY TO
RECOVER COSTS OF MEDICAL
CARE

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, along with Mr. EVANS of Illinois, the Committee's Ranking Member, I am introducing a bill to strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) rights under law to recover the costs of providing medical care to veterans and other persons from certain third parties. A number of public health plans either refuse to reimburse VA, or are prohibited from doing so by current law. This bill would correct this problem by eliminating barriers to reimbursement for VA care. It is identical to a bill I introduced in the 107th Congress, H.R. 5530. That bill was referred exclusively to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

H.R. 1715 is based upon the simple principle that acknowledges when VA provides medical care to an insured or Medicare-eligible veteran, VA should receive payment for the services it provides. This principle is not new. Since 1986, VA has had statutory authority to collect from traditional insurers such as Blue Cross-Blue Shield, Aetna, Mutual of Omaha and many others. These funds are used by VA to supplement appropriated funds to maintain high quality health care. VA also collects from so called "Medi-gap policies" that are an important adjunct to the Medicare program.

But VA is unable to collect from the massive managed care sector, accounting now for over two-thirds of all health plans in the United States, including the managed care plans within Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan. Nor can VA collect from the Medicare program. RAND Corporation has estimated that over 2 million Medicare-eligible veterans were enrolled in VA health care in fiscal year 2000, with that number increasing each fiscal year since then.

My legislation would require these federal programs to pay VA for care it provides to covered beneficiaries. This would increase the amount of money VA could collect by hundreds of millions of dollars each year—providing funds that are desperately needed to reduce these intolerable waiting lists and promote better use of all available health care resources.

This legislation will not limit the choices available to veterans in Medicare or any other

federal health care plan, and I do believe it will create a modest incentive for veterans to remain enrolled in the VA rather than move back and forth between systems as they do now. This bill will also provide an important supplement to the VA health care system for the services it renders in caring for many of our nation's heroes.

I urge my colleagues to support this common-sense approach to improving veterans' health care, reducing waiting times for VA health care, and helping Medicare-eligible and other federally insured veterans gain better health care coverage from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

TRIBUTE TO THE FOREIGN
AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

HON. BOB GOODLATTE

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, today Congressman STENHOLM and I are introducing a resolution recognizing the important service of the Foreign Agricultural Service of the Department of Agriculture on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service was established to develop and expand markets for United States agricultural commodities and products.

Our farmers and ranchers are the most productive in the world and produce much more than we in the United States can consume. Therefore a vibrant export market is very important to the success of United States agriculture. FAS has contributed to that success and as of 2002, United States agricultural exports exceed imports by more than \$12 billion. Our exports have grown significantly over the history of FAS and now exceed \$50 billion per year.

FAS fosters the public and private partnership that is needed to promote United States agricultural exports and to develop and expand markets around the world.

At this important time when free trade negotiations are ongoing, both in the World Trade Organization and through bilateral negotiations, the FAS is essential to represent United States agriculture and ensure that the challenges facing our agriculture producers are thoroughly addressed.

Another responsibility of the FAS is to provide food aid to needy people in developing countries and to help those countries to eventually become trading partners of the United States and buy our agricultural products.

The FAS and its employees provide a significant service to the farmers and ranchers here at home so that they can compete in worldwide markets. I congratulate them on their achievements and look forward to working closely with the FAS as the Committee continues its work to expand markets for United States agriculture.

NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in honor of National Public Health Week. I want to thank

the organizers and sponsors of events around the nation that serve to raise everyone's awareness of the need to improve public health, particularly in the area of the nation's obesity crisis. Those groups include the American Public Health Association, American Dietetic Association, Pfizer Inc., Association of American Medical Colleges, Association of Teachers of Preventive Medicine, Research!America, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

One of the greatest public health challenges facing our Nation today is curbing obesity, which has increased at such unprecedented levels that health professionals are calling obesity a national epidemic. Spurred by sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diets, about 60 percent of American adults are overweight and 15 percent of children and teenagers are overweight. The percentage of overweight adolescents has tripled during the last twenty years.

Although I am pleased that the numbers in my home state are slightly better, the percentage of the population that is obese is still troubling. What is even more troubling is the research that indicates that obesity is an even greater problem among the African-American and Latino communities.

The health consequences of obesity are real and significant. Being overweight is associated with increased risk for heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. About 300,000 deaths each year are associated with being obese. In fact, people who are overweight have a 50 to 100 percent increased risk of premature death. As the American Public Health Association stated in their release, "reversing this life threatening trend has moved beyond a matter of personal responsibility to a national crisis that all Americans must respond to."

Unfortunately, we are moving in the wrong direction. Less than ten percent of children walk or ride their bicycles to school and more schools are inviting fast food vendors into their cafeterias. We need to make a concerted effort to increase physical fitness activities among the entire population, especially children, and encourage all Americans to adopt a healthier diet that includes fruits and vegetables. I applaud the work of all of the organizations that are spreading this message during National Public Health Week. However, if we are going to be successful in reducing obesity, we must make sure that this message is heard the entire year and not just for one week.

That is why I will soon reintroduce my bill, the Medicaid Obesity Treatment Act. I hope to work with all of the sponsors involved with National Public Health Week to ensure passage of my bill in this Congress.

RECOGNIZING THE "FROM SEA TO
SHINING SEA: A CELEBRATION
OF MARINE SANCTUARIES" EXHIBIT
AT MOTE MARINE LABORATORY,
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

HON. KATHERINE HARRIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Ms. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the extraordinary work of the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation, as exemplified by an exhibit entitled "From Sea to